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By Rev. A. G. Axtell,  
Blair, Neb.

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# THE LEGEND OF THE LEAVES

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BY REV. A. G. AXTELL

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*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness:  
I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.—David.*

*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.—Isaiah.*

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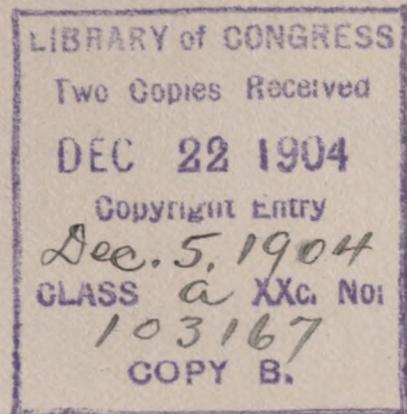
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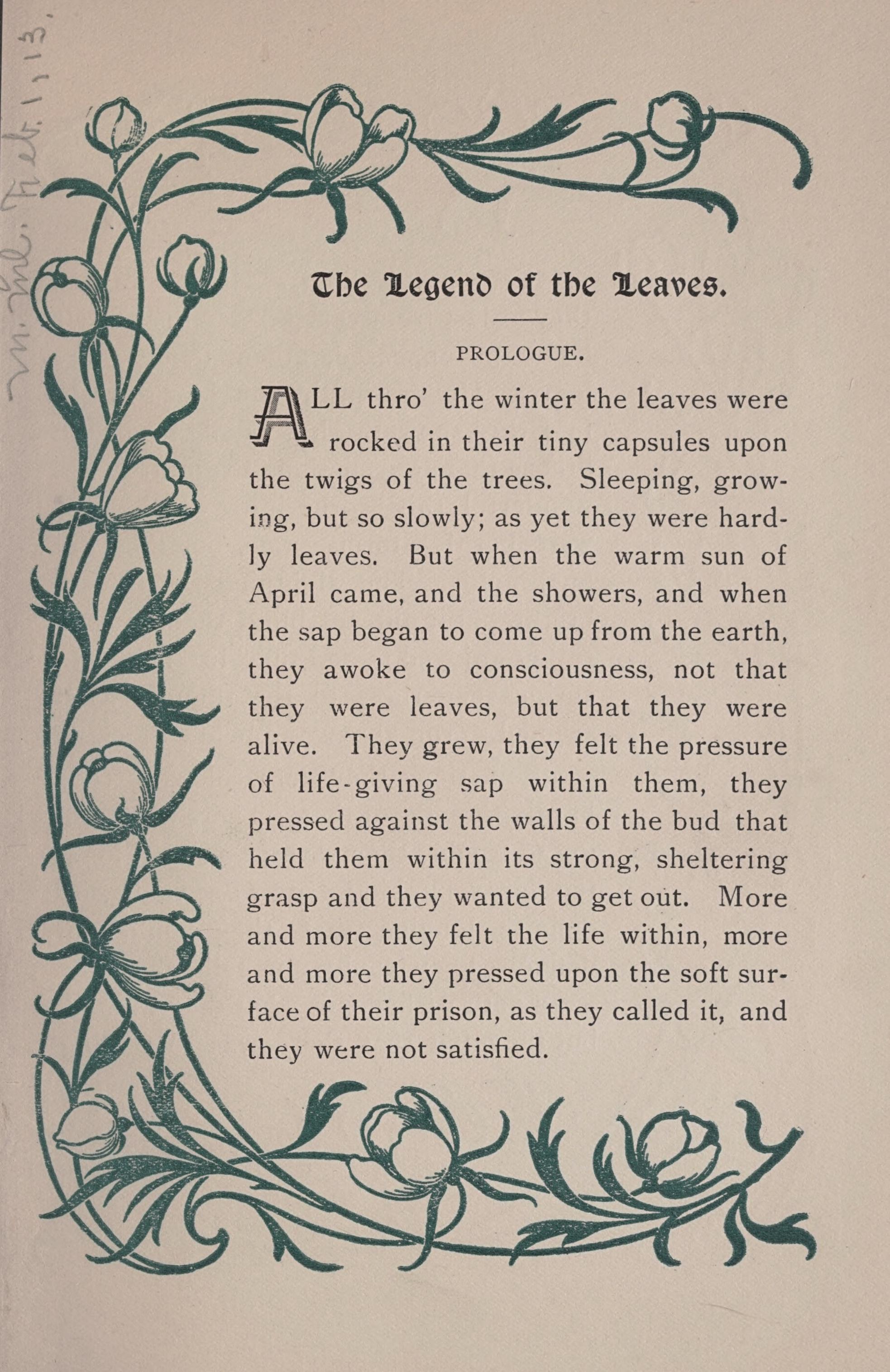
## Dedication.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF A DELIGHTFUL OUTING IN DE-  
SOTO WOODS, AND OF MANY OTHER DELIGHTFUL  
EXPERIENCES AFFORDED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BLAIR, NEBRASKA,  
THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS DEDICATED TO THEM, WITH  
THE SINCERE AFFECTION OF THEIR MINISTER.

BLAIR, NEBRASKA.

A. G. AXTELL.

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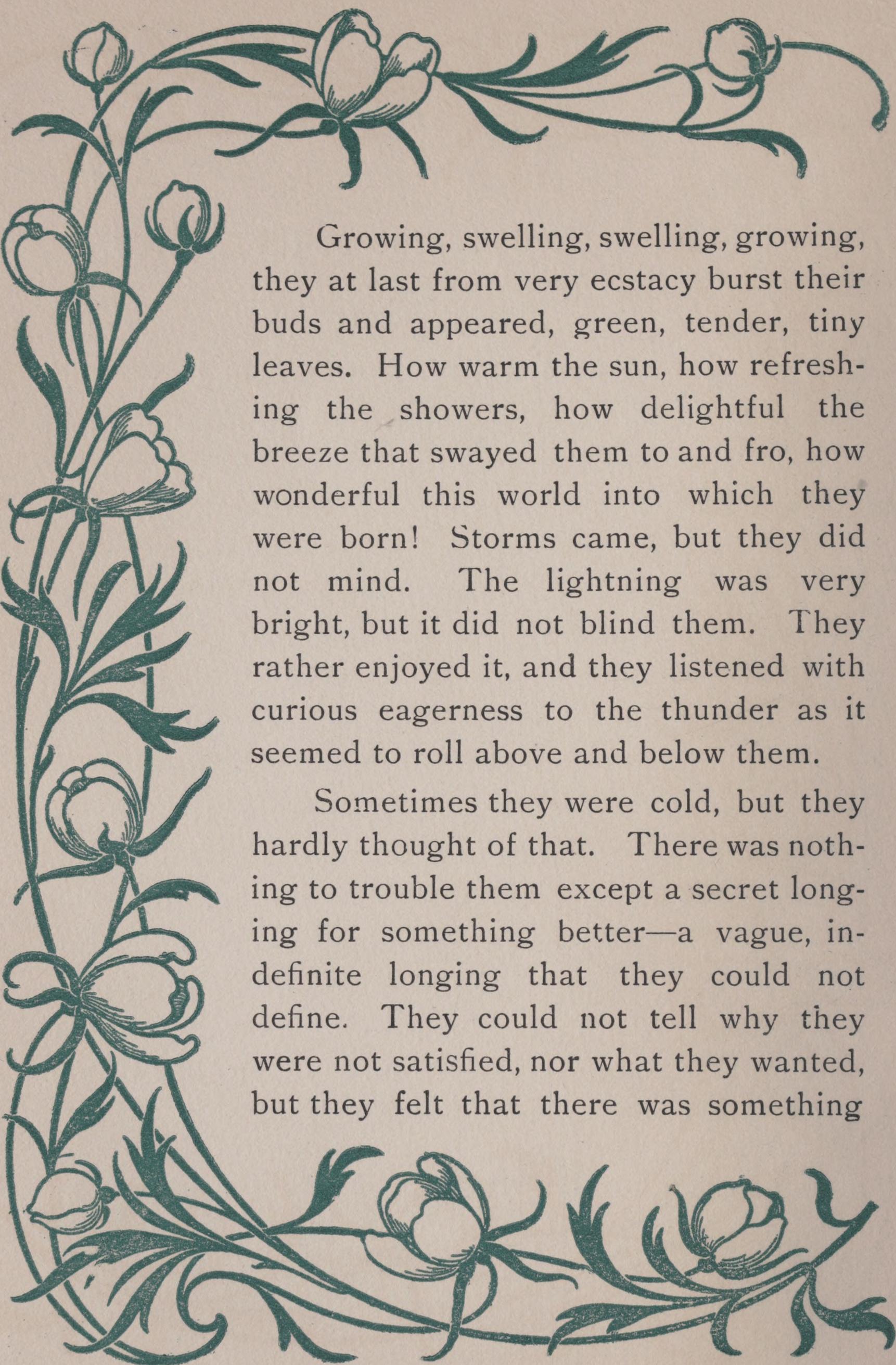


## The Legend of the Leaves.

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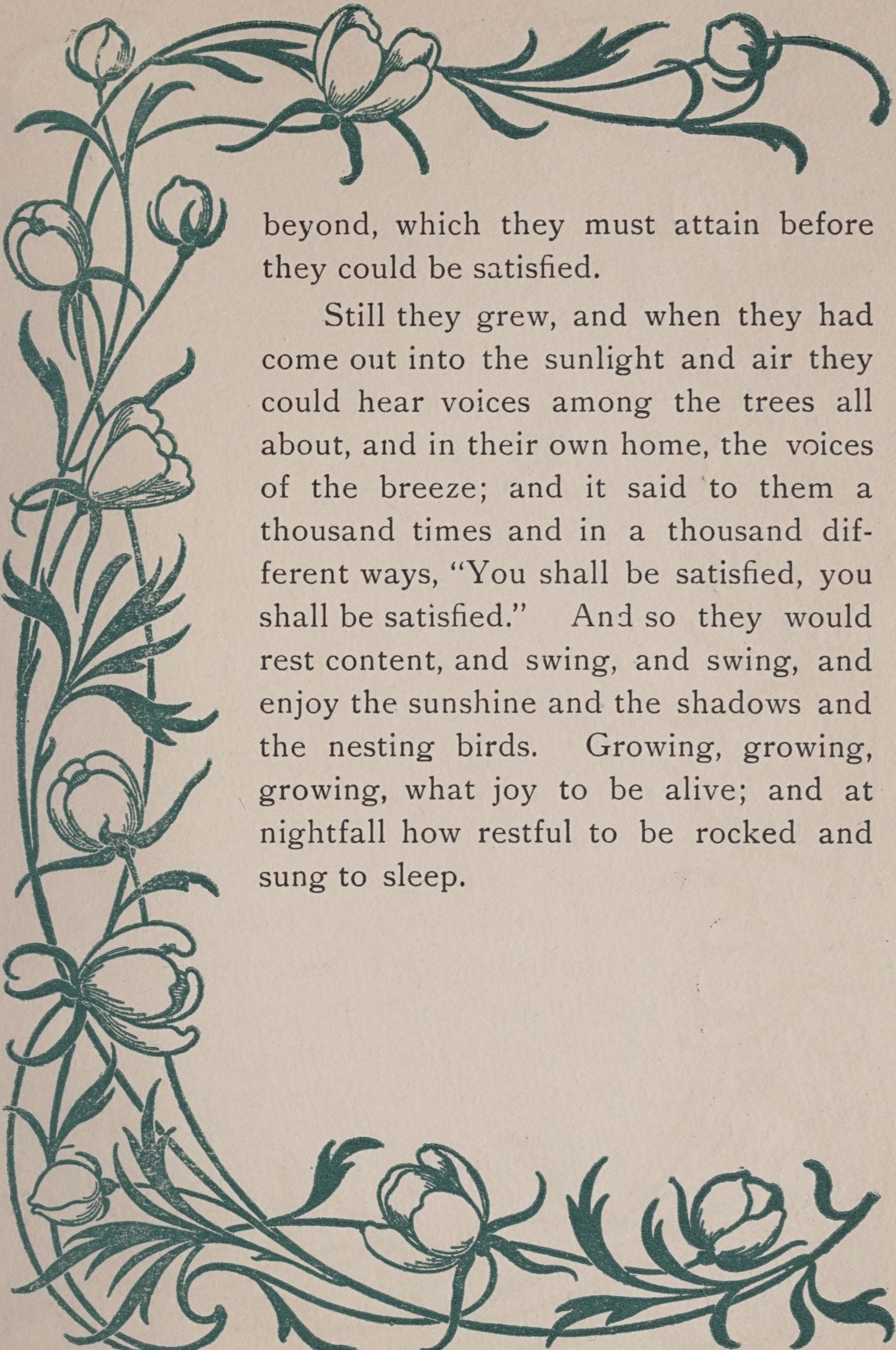
### PROLOGUE.

ALL thro' the winter the leaves were rocked in their tiny capsules upon the twigs of the trees. Sleeping, growing, but so slowly; as yet they were hardly leaves. But when the warm sun of April came, and the showers, and when the sap began to come up from the earth, they awoke to consciousness, not that they were leaves, but that they were alive. They grew, they felt the pressure of life-giving sap within them, they pressed against the walls of the bud that held them within its strong, sheltering grasp and they wanted to get out. More and more they felt the life within, more and more they pressed upon the soft surface of their prison, as they called it, and they were not satisfied.



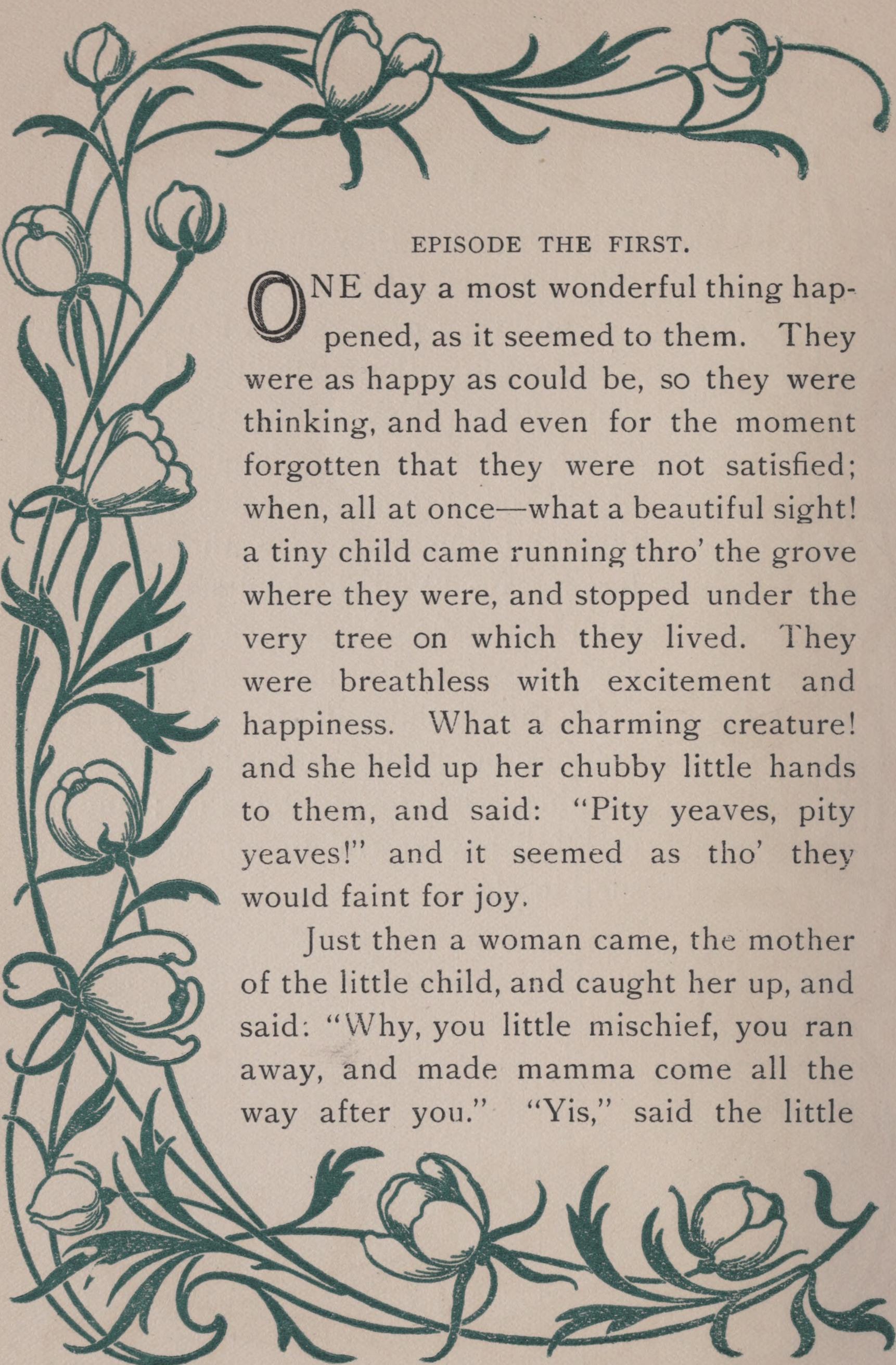
Growing, swelling, swelling, growing, they at last from very ecstacy burst their buds and appeared, green, tender, tiny leaves. How warm the sun, how refreshing the showers, how delightful the breeze that swayed them to and fro, how wonderful this world into which they were born! Storms came, but they did not mind. The lightning was very bright, but it did not blind them. They rather enjoyed it, and they listened with curious eagerness to the thunder as it seemed to roll above and below them.

Sometimes they were cold, but they hardly thought of that. There was nothing to trouble them except a secret longing for something better—a vague, indefinite longing that they could not define. They could not tell why they were not satisfied, nor what they wanted, but they felt that there was something



beyond, which they must attain before they could be satisfied.

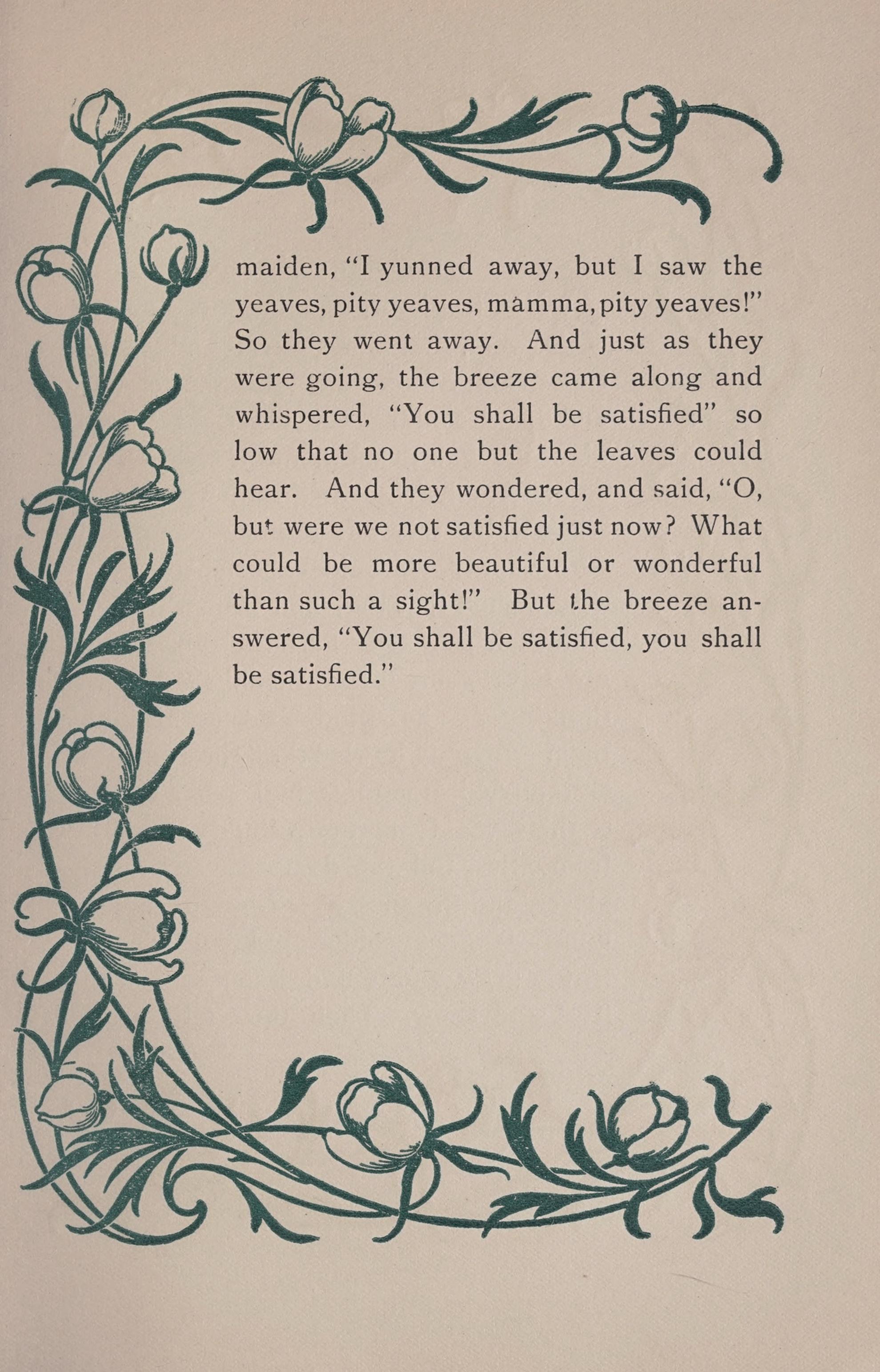
Still they grew, and when they had come out into the sunlight and air they could hear voices among the trees all about, and in their own home, the voices of the breeze; and it said to them a thousand times and in a thousand different ways, "You shall be satisfied, you shall be satisfied." And so they would rest content, and swing, and swing, and enjoy the sunshine and the shadows and the nesting birds. Growing, growing, growing, what joy to be alive; and at nightfall how restful to be rocked and sung to sleep.



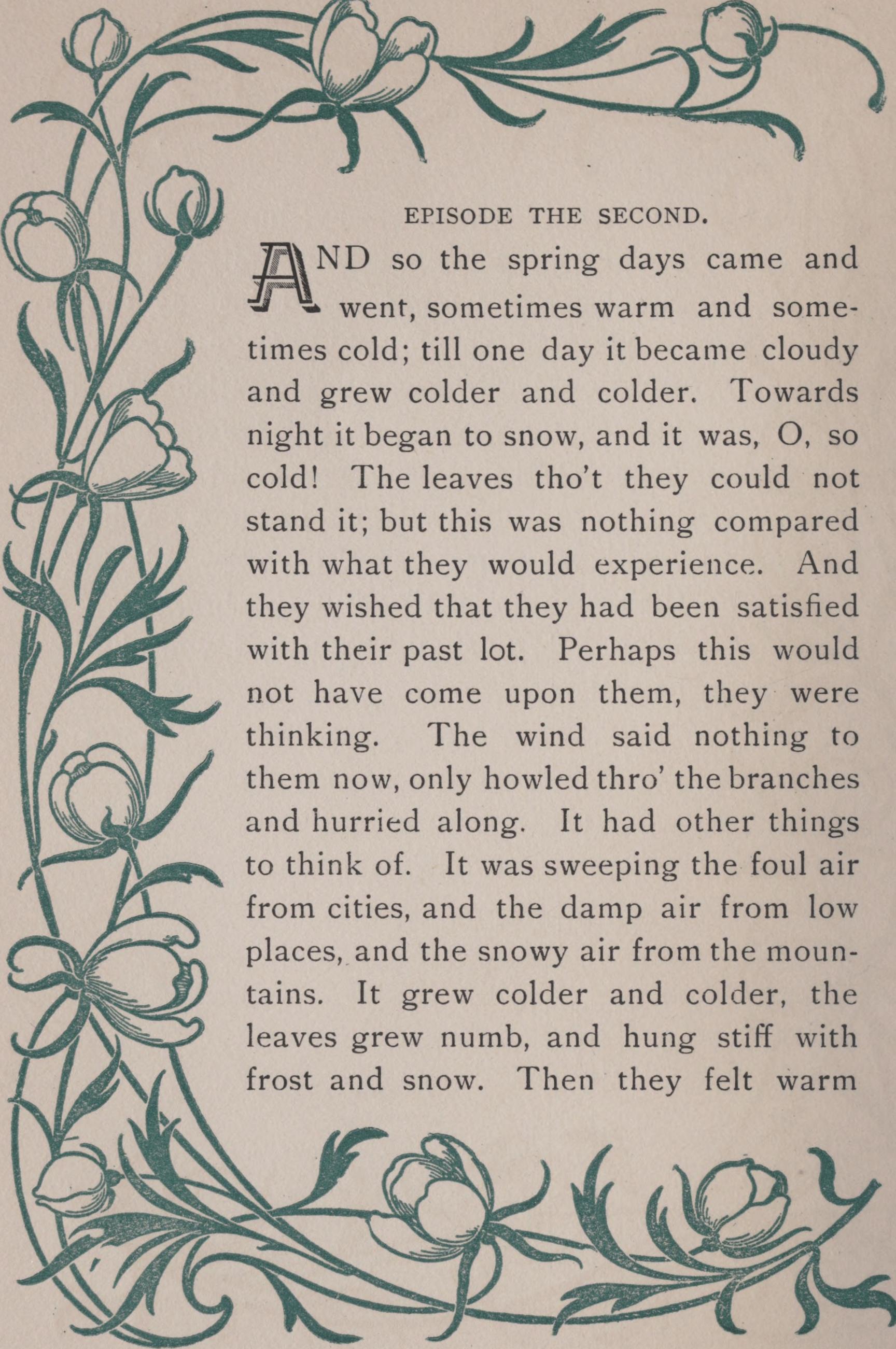
### EPISODE THE FIRST.

ONE day a most wonderful thing happened, as it seemed to them. They were as happy as could be, so they were thinking, and had even for the moment forgotten that they were not satisfied; when, all at once—what a beautiful sight! a tiny child came running thro' the grove where they were, and stopped under the very tree on which they lived. They were breathless with excitement and happiness. What a charming creature! and she held up her chubby little hands to them, and said: "Pity yeaves, pity yeaves!" and it seemed as tho' they would faint for joy.

Just then a woman came, the mother of the little child, and caught her up, and said: "Why, you little mischief, you ran away, and made mamma come all the way after you." "Yis," said the little

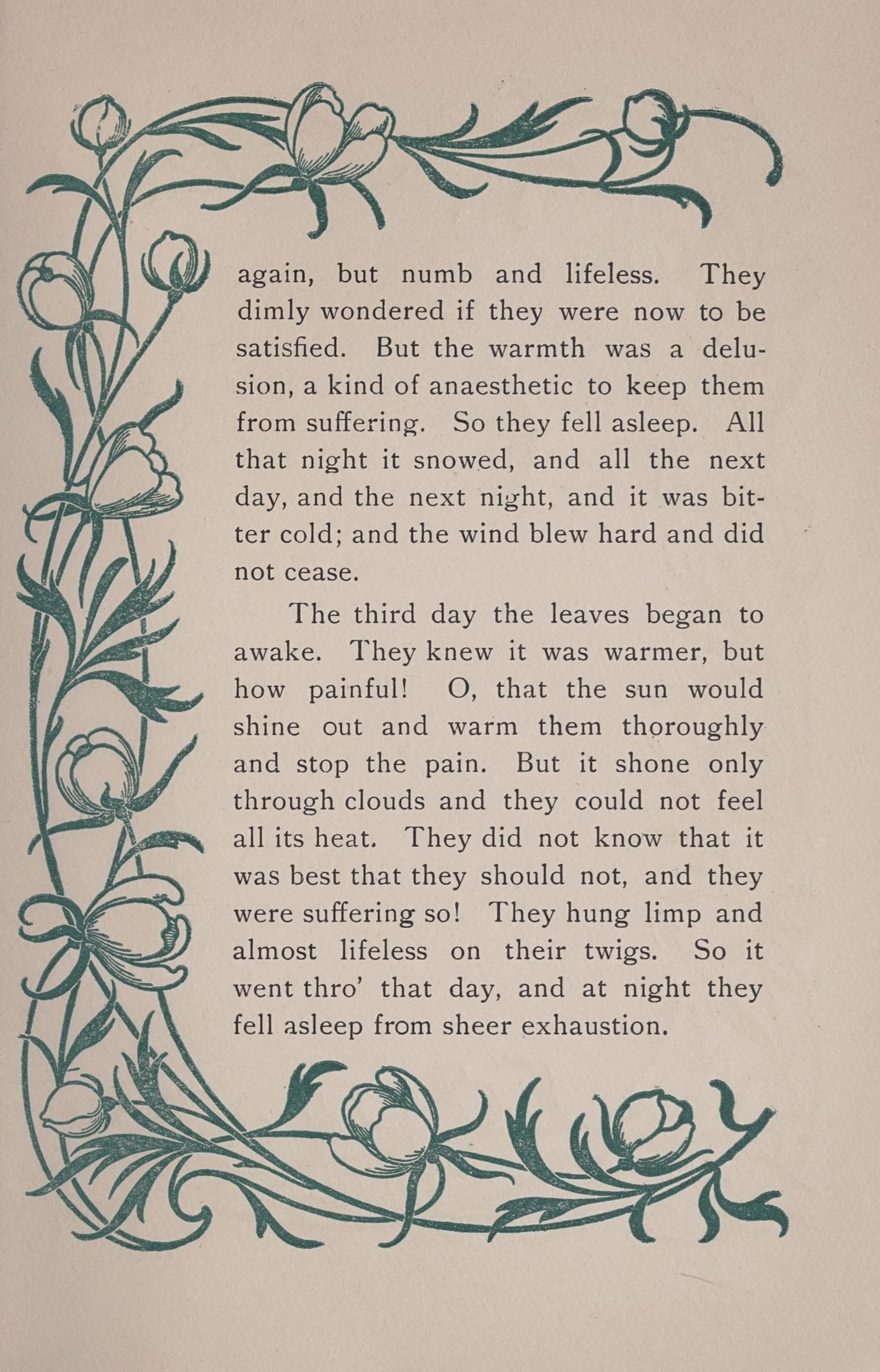


maiden, "I yunned away, but I saw the yeaves, pity yeaves, mamma, pity yeaves!" So they went away. And just as they were going, the breeze came along and whispered, "You shall be satisfied" so low that no one but the leaves could hear. And they wondered, and said, "O, but were we not satisfied just now? What could be more beautiful or wonderful than such a sight!" But the breeze answered, "You shall be satisfied, you shall be satisfied."



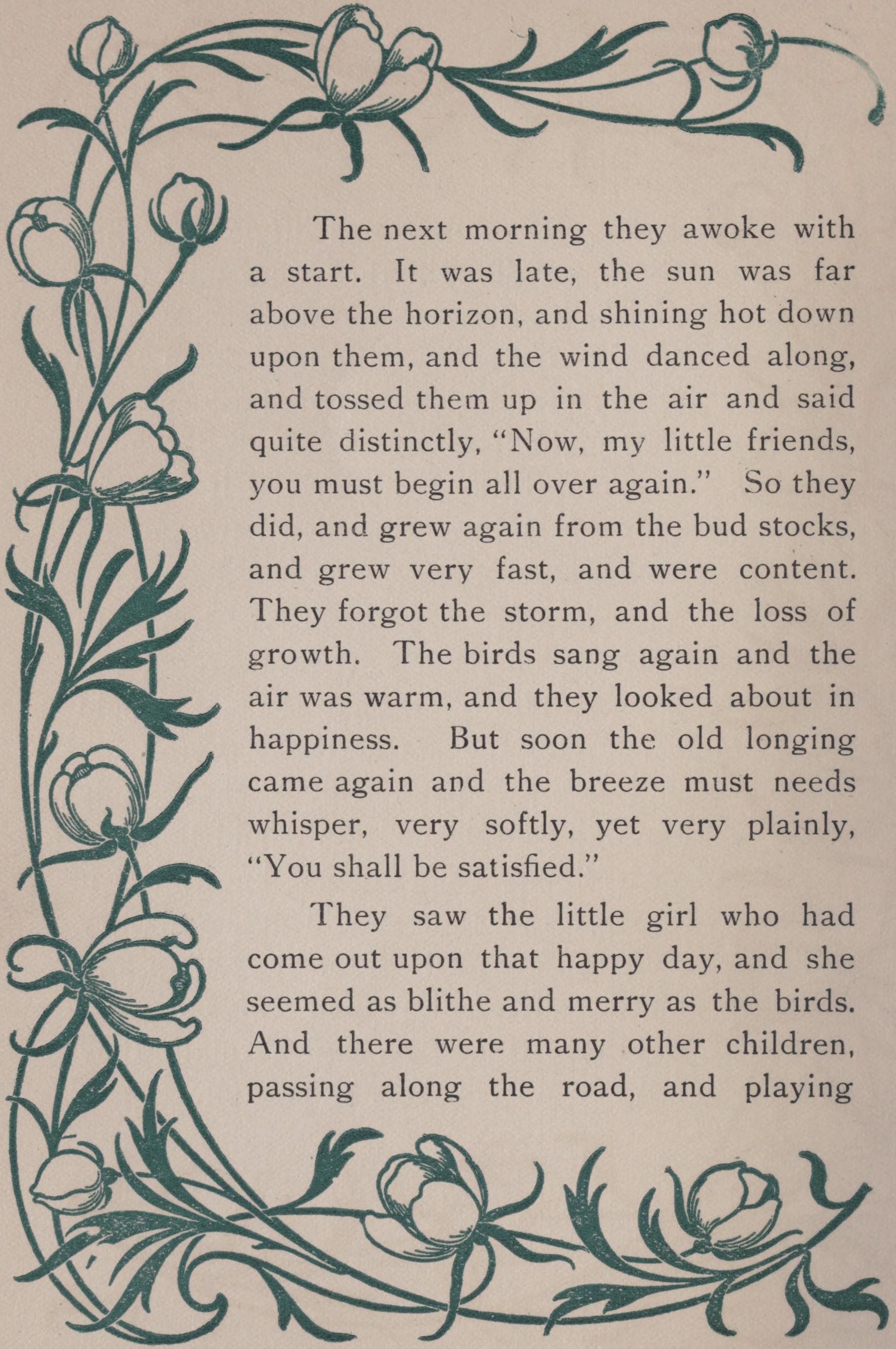
EPISODE THE SECOND.

**A**ND so the spring days came and went, sometimes warm and sometimes cold; till one day it became cloudy and grew colder and colder. Towards night it began to snow, and it was, O, so cold! The leaves tho't they could not stand it; but this was nothing compared with what they would experience. And they wished that they had been satisfied with their past lot. Perhaps this would not have come upon them, they were thinking. The wind said nothing to them now, only howled thro' the branches and hurried along. It had other things to think of. It was sweeping the foul air from cities, and the damp air from low places, and the snowy air from the mountains. It grew colder and colder, the leaves grew numb, and hung stiff with frost and snow. Then they felt warm



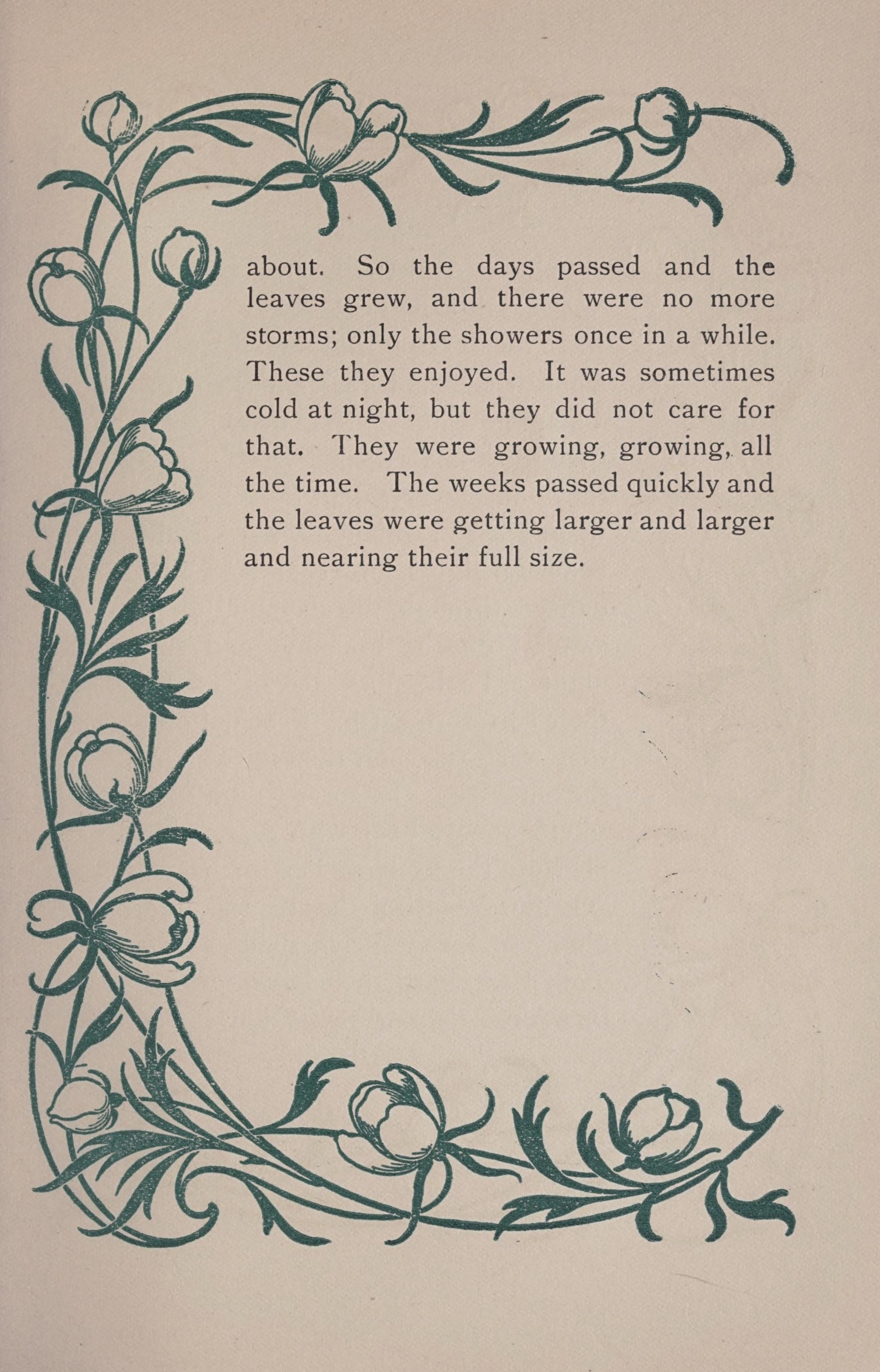
again, but numb and lifeless. They dimly wondered if they were now to be satisfied. But the warmth was a delusion, a kind of anaesthetic to keep them from suffering. So they fell asleep. All that night it snowed, and all the next day, and the next night, and it was bitter cold; and the wind blew hard and did not cease.

The third day the leaves began to awake. They knew it was warmer, but how painful! O, that the sun would shine out and warm them thoroughly and stop the pain. But it shone only through clouds and they could not feel all its heat. They did not know that it was best that they should not, and they were suffering so! They hung limp and almost lifeless on their twigs. So it went thro' that day, and at night they fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

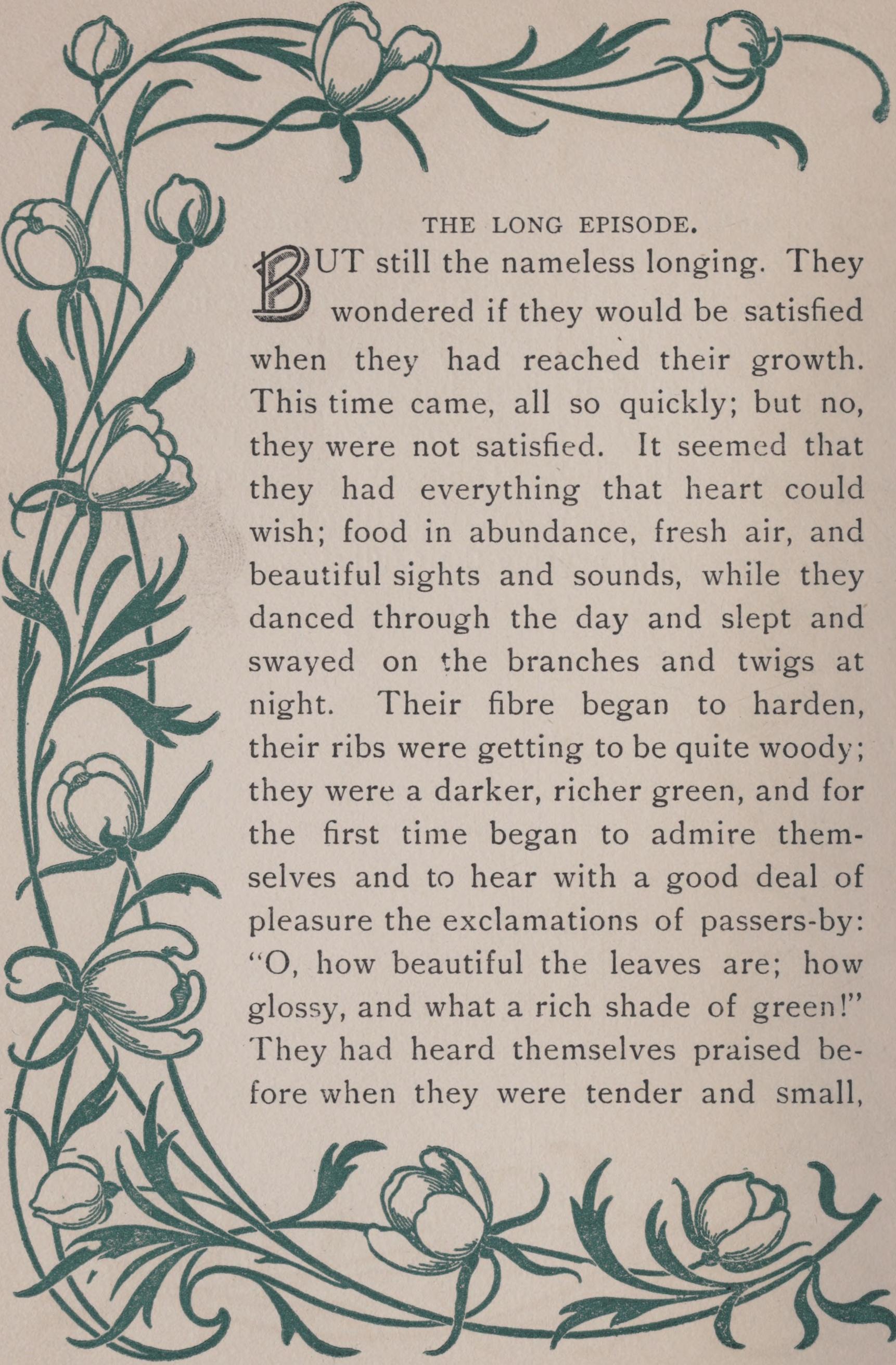


The next morning they awoke with a start. It was late, the sun was far above the horizon, and shining hot down upon them, and the wind danced along, and tossed them up in the air and said quite distinctly, "Now, my little friends, you must begin all over again." So they did, and grew again from the bud stocks, and grew very fast, and were content. They forgot the storm, and the loss of growth. The birds sang again and the air was warm, and they looked about in happiness. But soon the old longing came again and the breeze must needs whisper, very softly, yet very plainly, "You shall be satisfied."

They saw the little girl who had come out upon that happy day, and she seemed as blithe and merry as the birds. And there were many other children, passing along the road, and playing

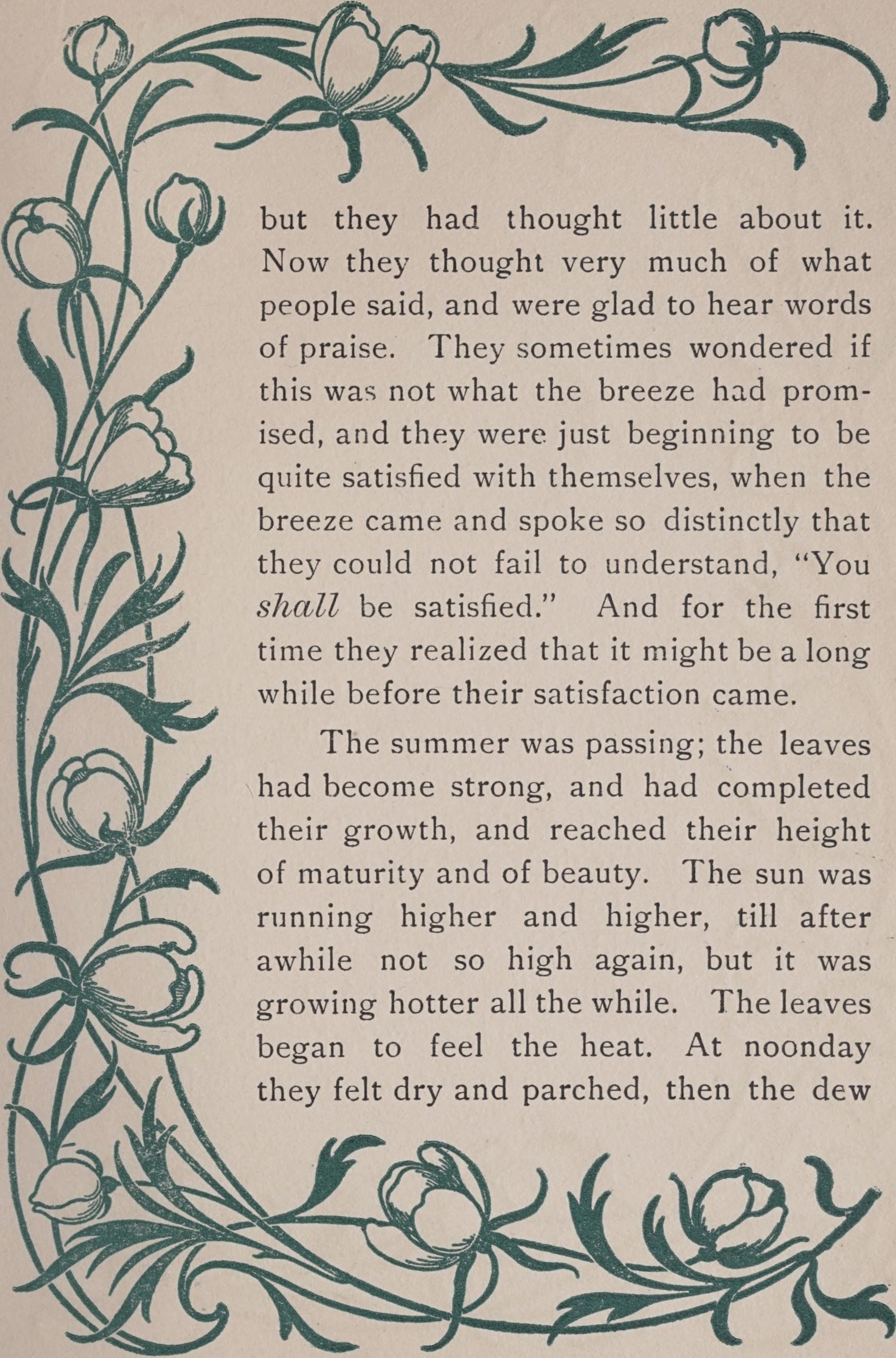


about. So the days passed and the leaves grew, and there were no more storms; only the showers once in a while. These they enjoyed. It was sometimes cold at night, but they did not care for that. They were growing, growing, all the time. The weeks passed quickly and the leaves were getting larger and larger and nearing their full size.



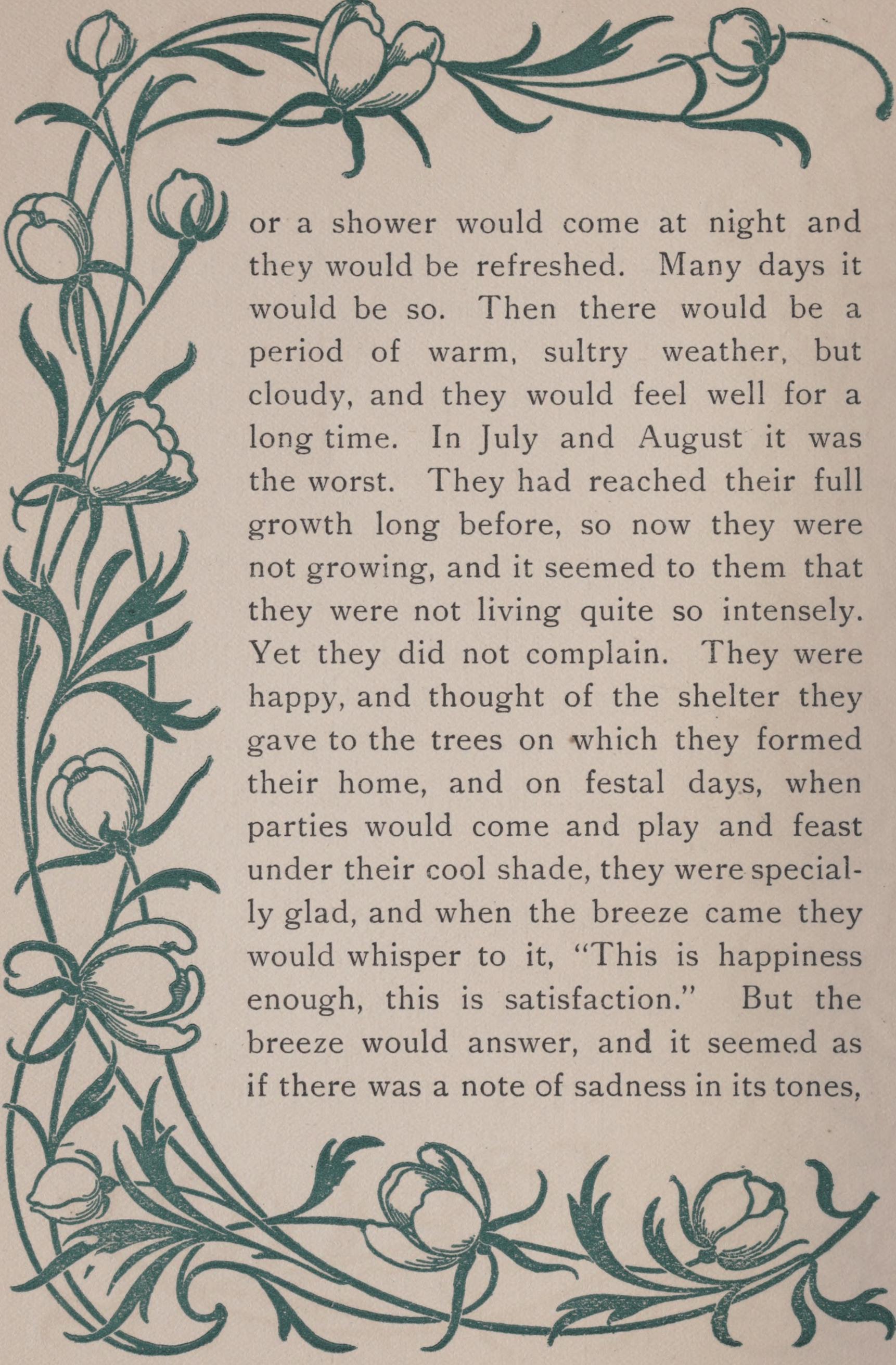
### THE LONG EPISODE.

**B**UT still the nameless longing. They wondered if they would be satisfied when they had reached their growth. This time came, all so quickly; but no, they were not satisfied. It seemed that they had everything that heart could wish; food in abundance, fresh air, and beautiful sights and sounds, while they danced through the day and slept and swayed on the branches and twigs at night. Their fibre began to harden, their ribs were getting to be quite woody; they were a darker, richer green, and for the first time began to admire themselves and to hear with a good deal of pleasure the exclamations of passers-by: "O, how beautiful the leaves are; how glossy, and what a rich shade of green!" They had heard themselves praised before when they were tender and small,

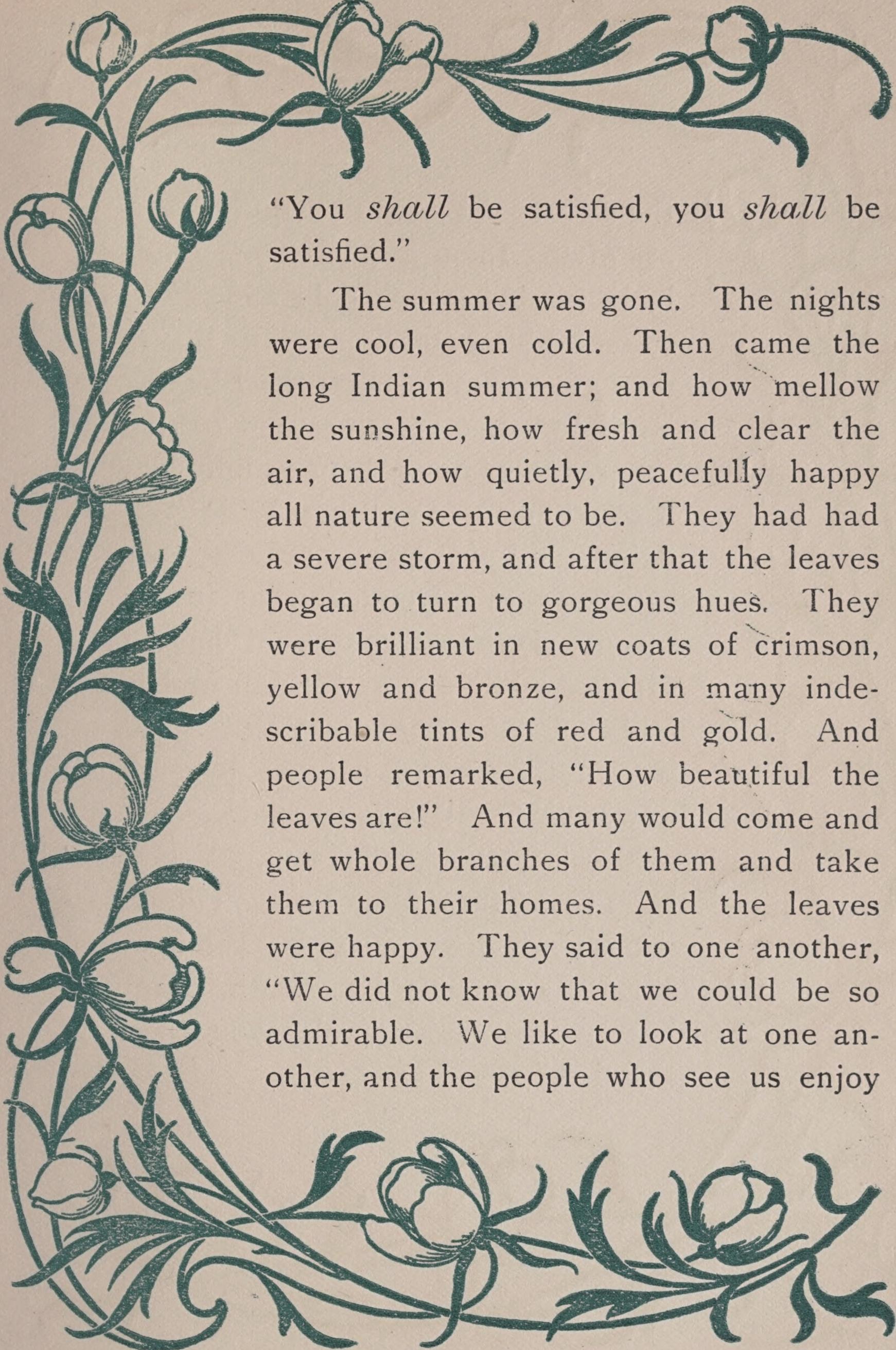


but they had thought little about it. Now they thought very much of what people said, and were glad to hear words of praise. They sometimes wondered if this was not what the breeze had promised, and they were just beginning to be quite satisfied with themselves, when the breeze came and spoke so distinctly that they could not fail to understand, "*You shall be satisfied.*" And for the first time they realized that it might be a long while before their satisfaction came.

The summer was passing; the leaves had become strong, and had completed their growth, and reached their height of maturity and of beauty. The sun was running higher and higher, till after awhile not so high again, but it was growing hotter all the while. The leaves began to feel the heat. At noonday they felt dry and parched, then the dew

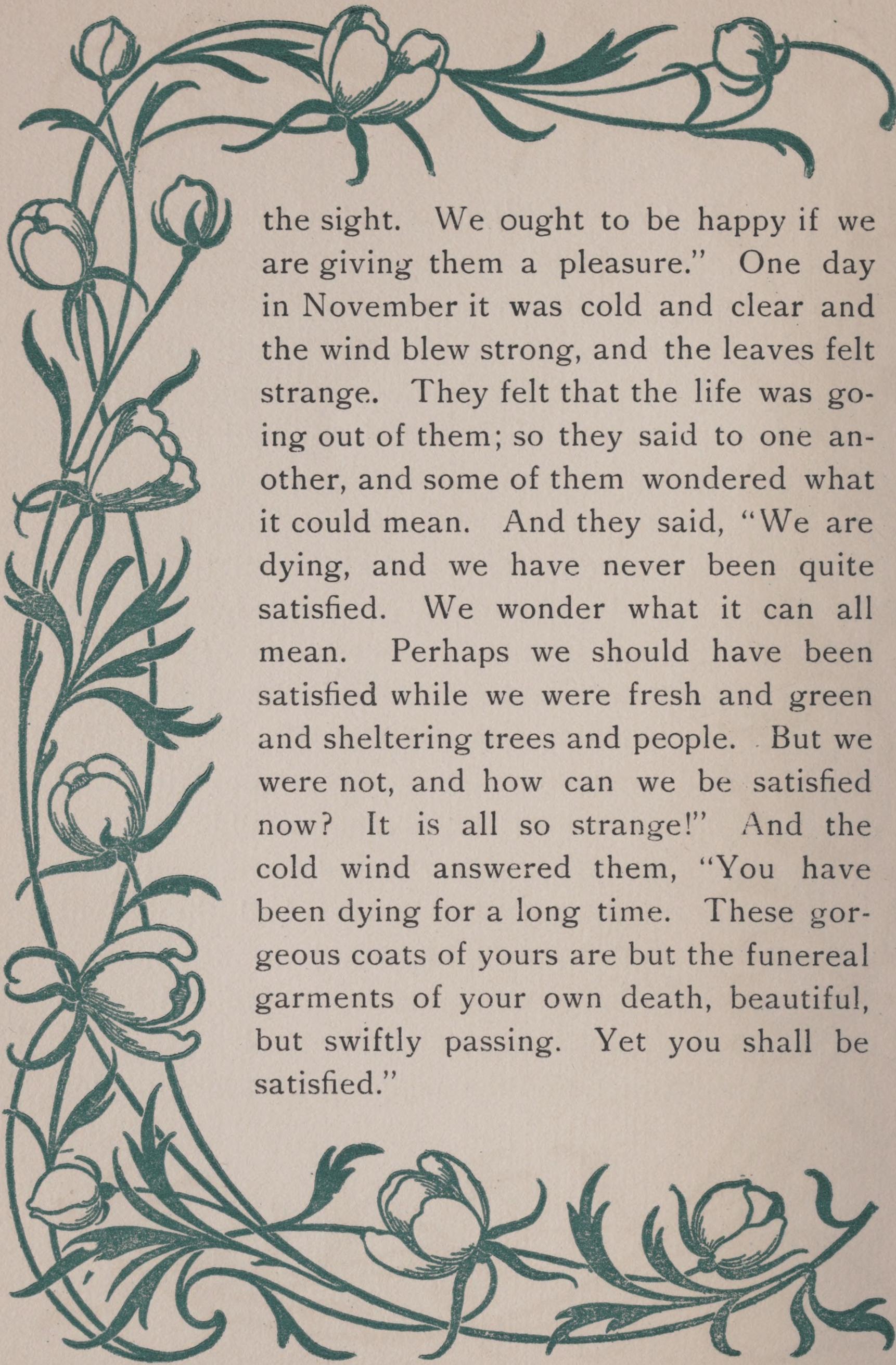


or a shower would come at night and they would be refreshed. Many days it would be so. Then there would be a period of warm, sultry weather, but cloudy, and they would feel well for a long time. In July and August it was the worst. They had reached their full growth long before, so now they were not growing, and it seemed to them that they were not living quite so intensely. Yet they did not complain. They were happy, and thought of the shelter they gave to the trees on which they formed their home, and on festal days, when parties would come and play and feast under their cool shade, they were specially glad, and when the breeze came they would whisper to it, "This is happiness enough, this is satisfaction." But the breeze would answer, and it seemed as if there was a note of sadness in its tones,

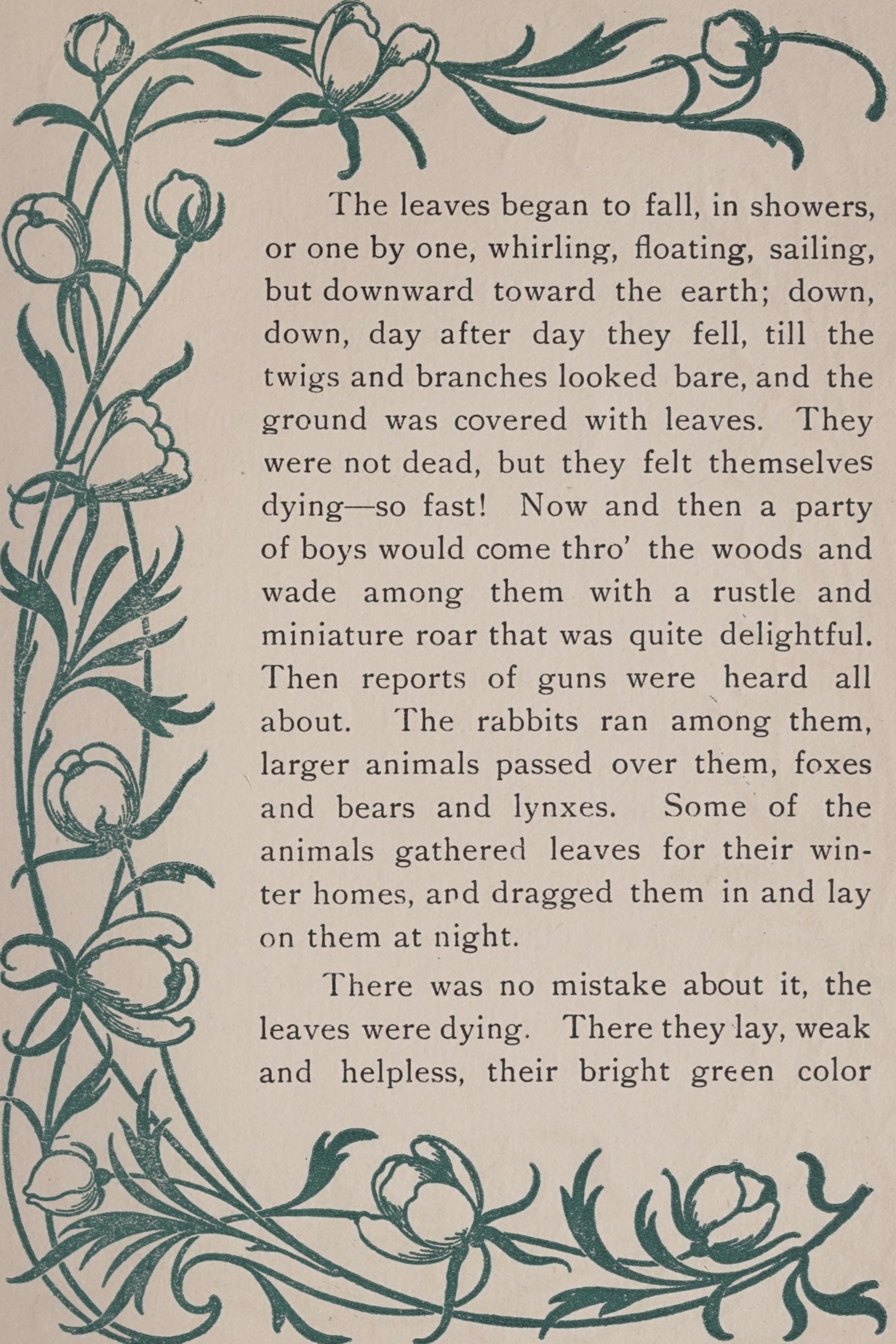


*“You shall be satisfied, you shall be satisfied.”*

The summer was gone. The nights were cool, even cold. Then came the long Indian summer; and how mellow the sunshine, how fresh and clear the air, and how quietly, peacefully happy all nature seemed to be. They had had a severe storm, and after that the leaves began to turn to gorgeous hues. They were brilliant in new coats of crimson, yellow and bronze, and in many indescribable tints of red and gold. And people remarked, “How beautiful the leaves are!” And many would come and get whole branches of them and take them to their homes. And the leaves were happy. They said to one another, “We did not know that we could be so admirable. We like to look at one another, and the people who see us enjoy



the sight. We ought to be happy if we are giving them a pleasure." One day in November it was cold and clear and the wind blew strong, and the leaves felt strange. They felt that the life was going out of them; so they said to one another, and some of them wondered what it could mean. And they said, "We are dying, and we have never been quite satisfied. We wonder what it can all mean. Perhaps we should have been satisfied while we were fresh and green and sheltering trees and people. But we were not, and how can we be satisfied now? It is all so strange!" And the cold wind answered them, "You have been dying for a long time. These gorgeous coats of yours are but the funereal garments of your own death, beautiful, but swiftly passing. Yet you shall be satisfied."

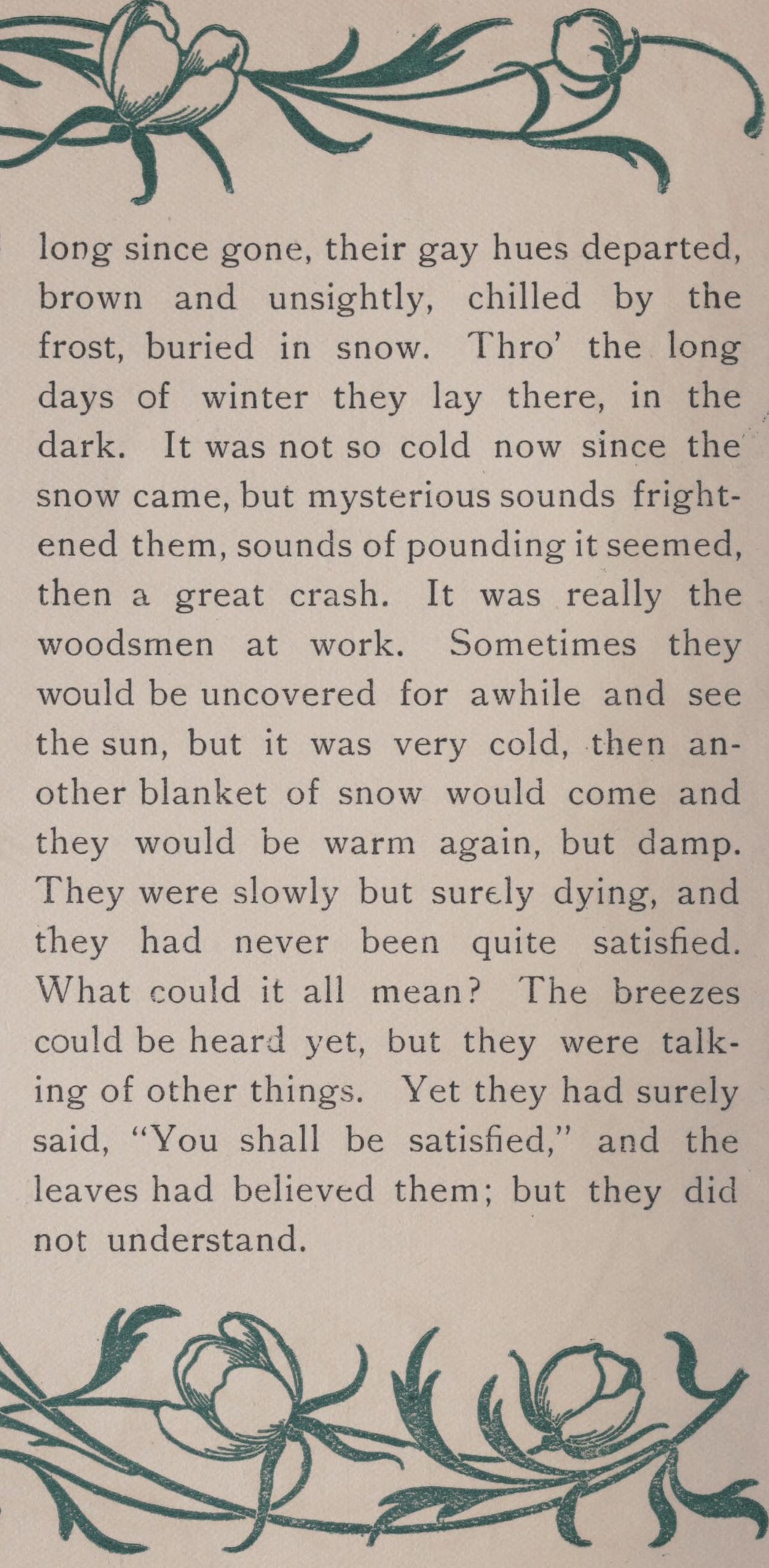


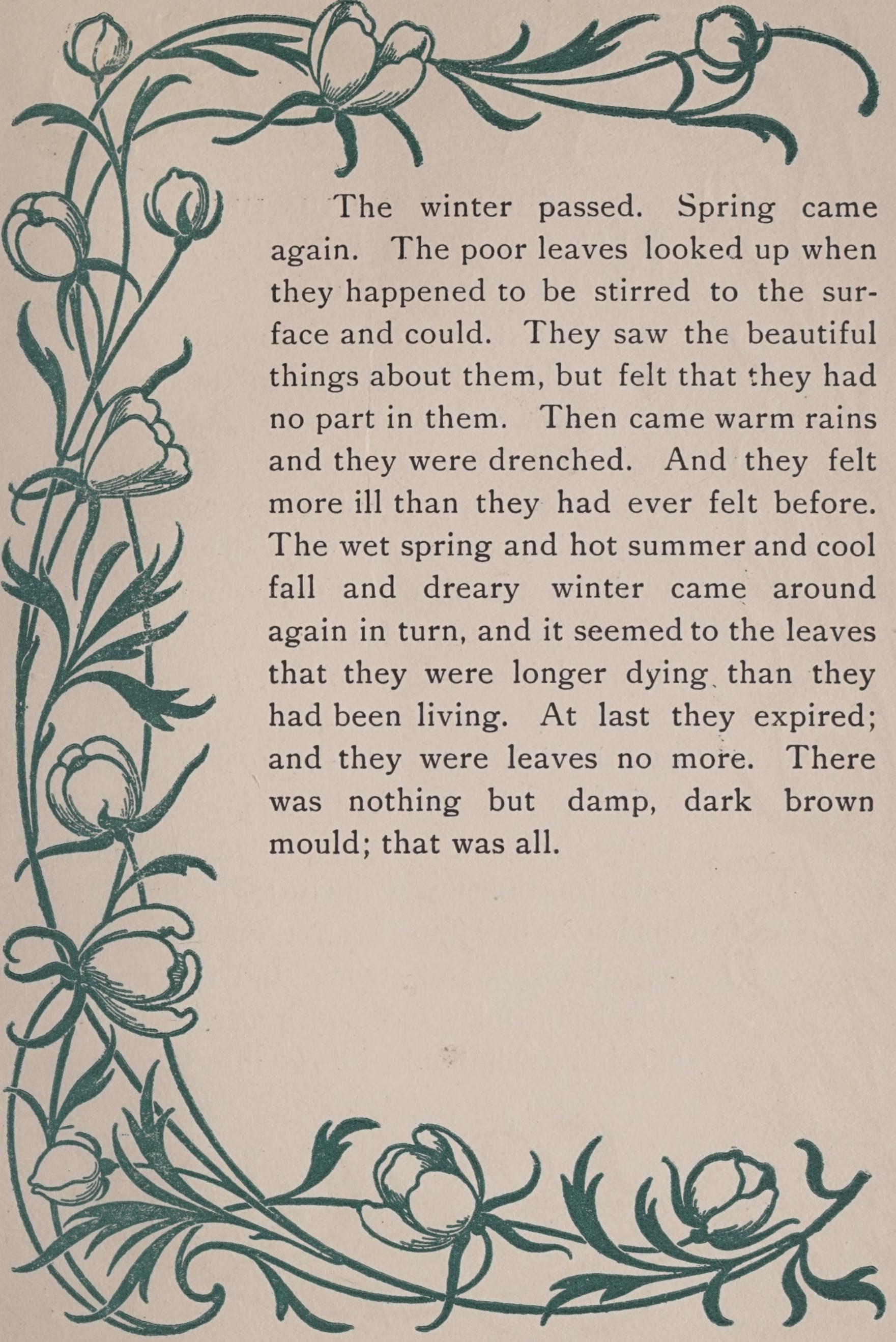
The leaves began to fall, in showers, or one by one, whirling, floating, sailing, but downward toward the earth; down, down, day after day they fell, till the twigs and branches looked bare, and the ground was covered with leaves. They were not dead, but they felt themselves dying—so fast! Now and then a party of boys would come thro' the woods and wade among them with a rustle and miniature roar that was quite delightful. Then reports of guns were heard all about. The rabbits ran among them, larger animals passed over them, foxes and bears and lynxes. Some of the animals gathered leaves for their winter homes, and dragged them in and lay on them at night.

There was no mistake about it, the leaves were dying. There they lay, weak and helpless, their bright green color

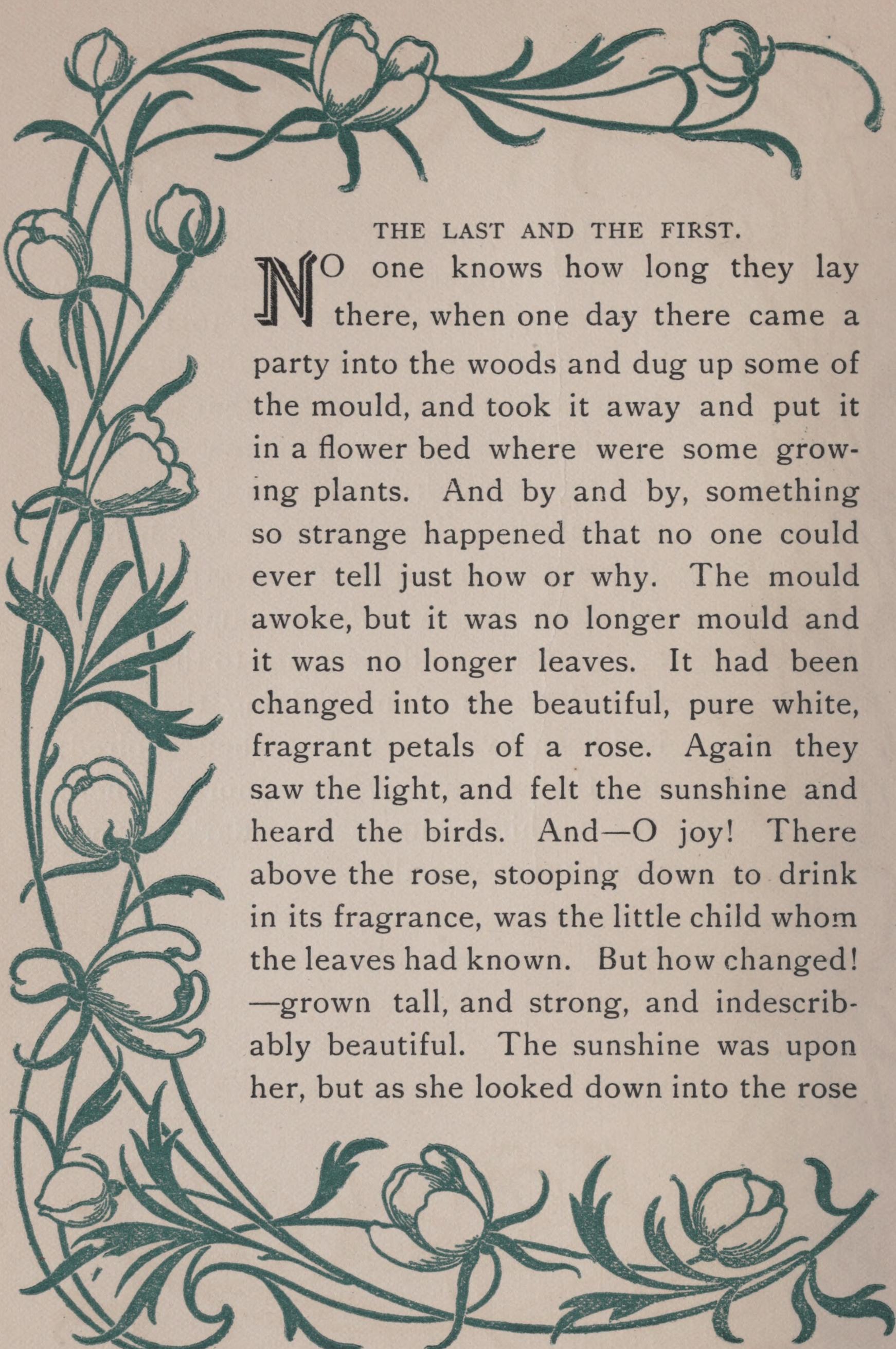


long since gone, their gay hues departed, brown and unsightly, chilled by the frost, buried in snow. Thro' the long days of winter they lay there, in the dark. It was not so cold now since the snow came, but mysterious sounds frightened them, sounds of pounding it seemed, then a great crash. It was really the woodsmen at work. Sometimes they would be uncovered for awhile and see the sun, but it was very cold, then another blanket of snow would come and they would be warm again, but damp. They were slowly but surely dying, and they had never been quite satisfied. What could it all mean? The breezes could be heard yet, but they were talking of other things. Yet they had surely said, "You shall be satisfied," and the leaves had believed them; but they did not understand.





The winter passed. Spring came again. The poor leaves looked up when they happened to be stirred to the surface and could. They saw the beautiful things about them, but felt that they had no part in them. Then came warm rains and they were drenched. And they felt more ill than they had ever felt before. The wet spring and hot summer and cool fall and dreary winter came around again in turn, and it seemed to the leaves that they were longer dying than they had been living. At last they expired; and they were leaves no more. There was nothing but damp, dark brown mould; that was all.



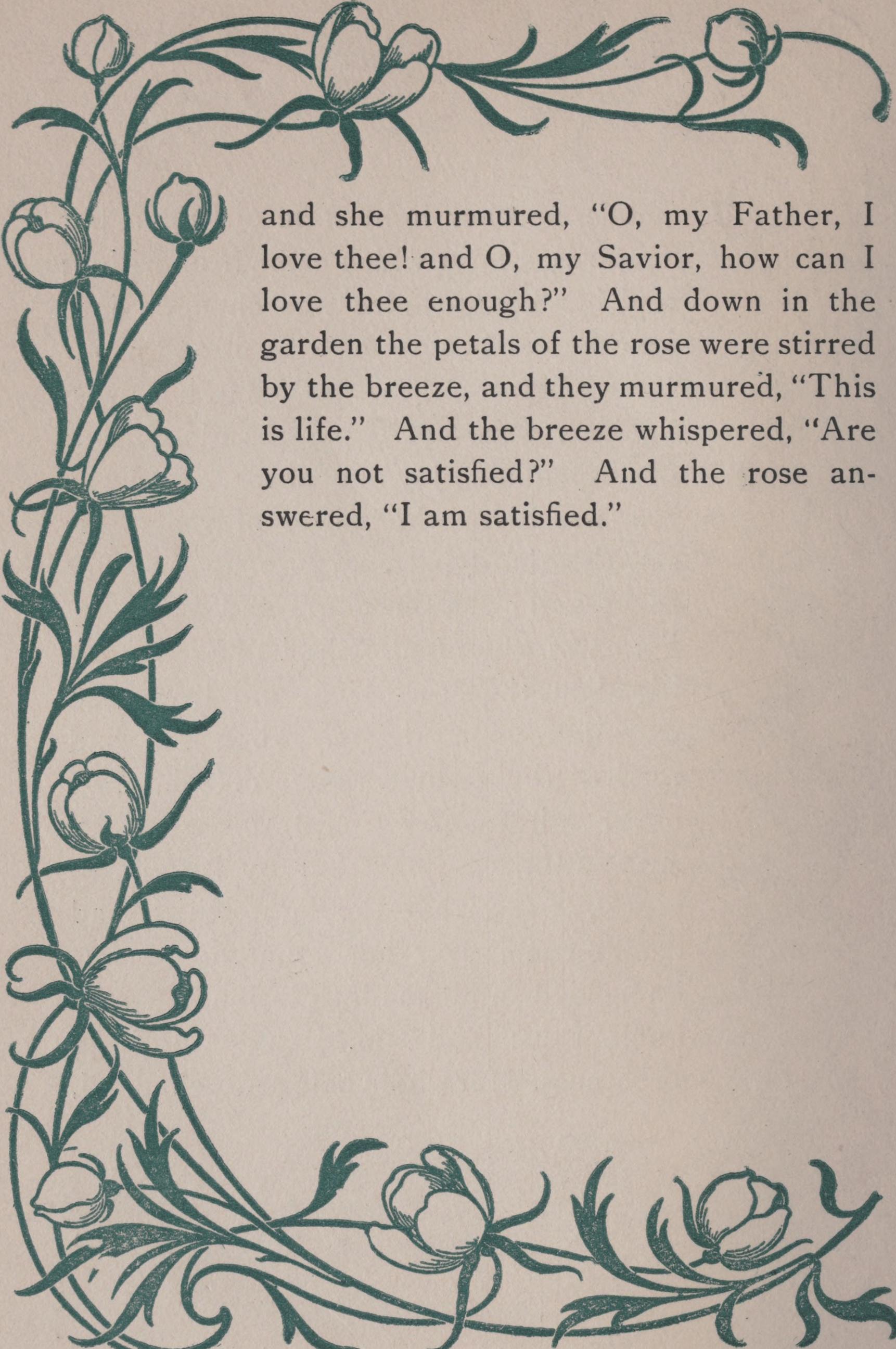
THE LAST AND THE FIRST.

**N**O one knows how long they lay there, when one day there came a party into the woods and dug up some of the mould, and took it away and put it in a flower bed where were some growing plants. And by and by, something so strange happened that no one could ever tell just how or why. The mould awoke, but it was no longer mould and it was no longer leaves. It had been changed into the beautiful, pure white, fragrant petals of a rose. Again they saw the light, and felt the sunshine and heard the birds. And—O joy! There above the rose, stooping down to drink in its fragrance, was the little child whom the leaves had known. But how changed!—grown tall, and strong, and indescribably beautiful. The sunshine was upon her, but as she looked down into the rose

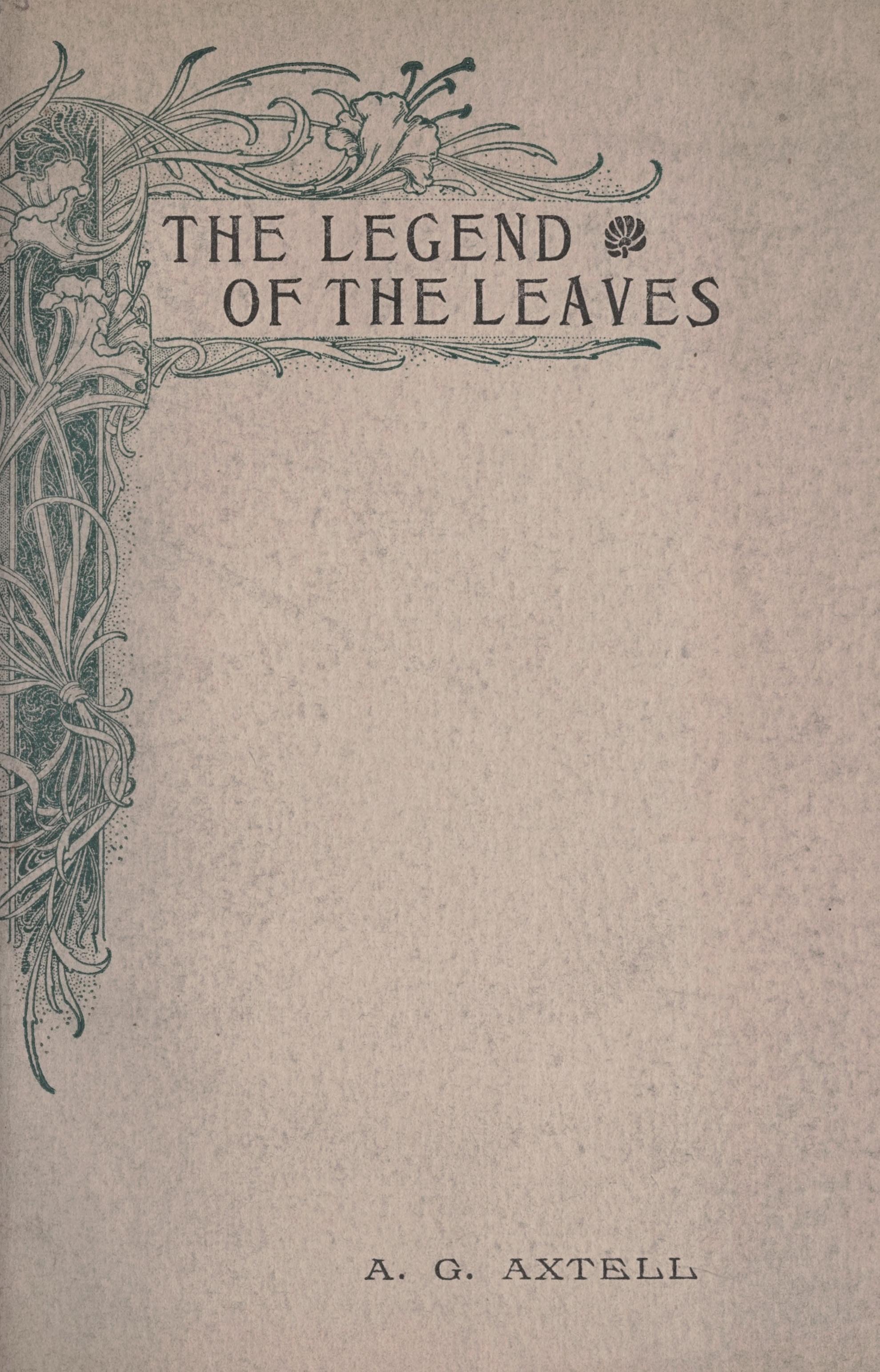


petals, another light stole out upon her features, a light which came from within; and her countenance was changed into an ethereal beauty such as it had never known before. Tears welled to her eyes; but they were not tears of sadness, but of unspeakable joy and peace. And the rose was given the power of vision. It saw the girl depart, and go up into her room, and close the door, and kneel by her snow-white bed. She had been reading about the crucifixion, and it was sad upon her young heart. Then she had read of the resurrection. Yet she had never felt its power till this moment. And as the rose saw her by its gift of vision, it saw that the light which had before come over her countenance was intensified and made glorious as she knelt thus; and there was ineffable sweetness. Her whole being was changed,





and she murmured, "O, my Father, I love thee! and O, my Savior, how can I love thee enough?" And down in the garden the petals of the rose were stirred by the breeze, and they murmured, "This is life." And the breeze whispered, "Are you not satisfied?" And the rose answered, "I am satisfied."



THE LEGEND  
OF THE LEAVES

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